

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Mt. Vernon School District Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2006-2007

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Dates of On Site Visit: January 9, 2007

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This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by Special Education Programs. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

- Promising Practice** The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
- Meets Requirements** The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
- Needs Assistance** The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement and is out of compliance.
- Needs Intervention** The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement and is out of compliance.
- Not applicable** In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.
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Principal 1 – General Supervision

General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- A – General District Information
- Surveys
- Comprehensive plan
- Preschool Screening

Meets Requirements:

The Mt. Vernon School District has an established and effectively implemented ongoing child find system to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities, ages birth through 21 years, who may need special education.

The district has no private schools; however, if the district did, it would provide for children with disabilities that are eligible for special education and are voluntarily enrolled in private schools by their parents to participate in services in accordance with the requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Mt. Vernon School District uses data-based decision making procedures to review and analyze school district level data to determine if the district is making progress towards the state's performance goals and indicators.

The district has not had a student receive a long-term suspension or expulsion. However, if this should occur, the district would review and analyze discipline data and revise policies/procedures if significant discrepancies were to occur between the long-term suspension and expulsion rates for children with and without disabilities.

The Mt. Vernon School District ensures that staff hired, employed, or contracted with are appropriately supervised, and fully licensed to work with children with disabilities. The Mt. Vernon School District does determine personnel development needs of staff and provides staff development opportunities to meet those identified needs.

Needs Improvement:

Data tables and district information, indicates the school needs to improve the pre-referral process by utilizing the Teachers Assistance Team (TAT) team.

Validation Results

Meets Requirements

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meeting requirements and needs improvement for Principle One: General Supervision, as concluded by the steering committee.

Principal 2- Free Appropriate Public Education

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3rd birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- State data table I – Age Placement Alternative Data
- Surveys
- Student files
- District information

Meets requirements

Based on parent surveys, staff surveys, state tables, and preschool screening records, the steering committee determined that the school district does provide a free and appropriate public education to all eligible children with disabilities. The district has no students with disabilities that have been suspended for more than 10 days or expelled. The comprehensive plan outlines the procedure to follow if it would be necessary.

Validation Results

Meets Requirements

The monitoring team identified all areas as meeting requirements for Principle Two: Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), with the exception of Services to Children ages 3-21.

Needs Intervention

Issues requiring immediate attention:

ARSD 24:05:13:02 Free appropriate public education (FAPE)

FAPE includes special education and related which meet the following requirements: 1. Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; 2. Meet the standards of the state board in this article and the implementing regulations for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; 3. Include preschool, kindergarten, elementary school and secondary school education in South Dakota; and 4. Are provided in conformity with an individual educational program and the article.

Through a student file review, the monitoring team determined there is a student (#10) identified with a disability that is not being provided special education services in accordance with state requirements. The student was determined eligible for services in developmental delay in October 2006. An IEP was developed; however, all areas of developmental concern were not addressed. Through the file review and staff interview, it was determined that special education services in these areas are not being provided, nor did the parent decline the service.

The district must reconvene the student's IEP committee and complete documentation to provide FAPE to the student.

Principal 3 – Appropriate Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Surveys
- Student file reviews

Meets requirements

Based on file review, Mt. Vernon School District ensures the evaluation and reevaluation procedures and instruments meet the minimum requirements. The Mt. Vernon School District ensures the proper identification of students with disabilities through the evaluation process. In addition, they ensure that reevaluations are conducted in accordance with all procedural requires to ensure students are appropriately evaluated for continuing eligibility.

Validation Results

Meets Requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the steering committee that data for Principle Three: Appropriate Evaluation meets the requirements, with the exception of Determination of Needed Evaluation Data. See information under: Needs Assistance

Needs Assistance

ARSD 24:05:25:04:02. Determination of needed evaluation data

As part of an evaluation, the individual education program team and other individuals with knowledge and skills necessary to interpret evaluation data, determine whether the child has a disability, and determine whether the child needs special education and related services, as appropriate, shall review existing evaluation data on the child, including: evaluations and information provided by the parents of the child; current classroom-based assessments and observations; and observations by teachers and related services providers.

File reviews completed by the review team indicated parental input into the evaluation process was not documented. District staff document phone calls to parents regarding evaluation; however, parent input into needed evaluation data is not documented.

Principal 4 – Procedural Safeguards

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Surveys
- Student file reviews
- District's Comprehensive plan

Meets requirements

The Mt. Vernon School District ensures parents are informed of their parental rights under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The school district's comprehensive plan outlines procedures to ensure the rights of children if no parent is identified.

The school district's comprehensive plan provides procedures on procedural safeguards, which provides the parents of a child in need of special education or special education and related services with the opportunity to inspect and review all educational records concerning the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of a free appropriate public education. The comprehensive plan outlines policies and procedures for responding to complaints and due process hearing.

Needs Improvement

The Mt. Vernon School District needs to improve in the area of providing the parents of a child in need of special education or special education and related services with the opportunity to inspect and review all educational records concerning the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of a free appropriate public education. The district also noted improvement was needed to properly implement policy and procedures for destruction of personally identifiable educational records.

Out of Compliance

The district does not meet the surrogate requirement, as no list of surrogate parents is available in the district.

Validation Results

Meets Requirements

The review team agrees with the steering committee that data for Principle Four: Procedural Safeguards meets requirements, with the exception of surrogate parent requirement. See information under: Needs Assistance. Interviews with district staff indicated the district had addressed the need to properly implement policy and procedures for destruction of personally identifiable educational records.

Needs Assistance

ARSD 24:05:30:15 Surrogate parents: Each school district shall establish procedures for the assignment of a surrogate parent to ensure that the rights of a child are protected if no parent can be identified and the district, after reasonable effort, cannot discover the whereabouts of a parent or if the child is a ward of the state. At a minimum, a district's method for determining whether a child needs a surrogate parent must include the following: (1) The identification of staff members at the district or building level responsible for referring students in need of a surrogate parent; (2) The provision of in-service training on the criteria in this section for determining whether a child needs a surrogate parent; and (3) The establishment of a referral system within the district for the appointment of a surrogate parent. The district superintendent or designee shall appoint surrogate parents. The district shall ensure that a person selected as a surrogate has no interest that conflicts with the interest of the child the surrogate represents and has knowledge and skills that ensure representation of the child. The district is responsible for the training and certification of surrogate parents and shall maintain a list of persons who may serve as surrogate parents. A district may select as a surrogate a person who is an employee of a nonpublic agency that only provides noneducational care for the child and who meets the conflict of interest and knowledge standards in this section. A person assigned as a surrogate may not be an employee of a public agency that is involved in the education or

care of the child. A person who otherwise qualifies to be a surrogate under the provisions of this section is not an employee of the agency solely because the person is paid by the agency to serve as a surrogate parent. The surrogate parent may represent the student in all matters relating to the identification, evaluation, educational placement, and provision of FAPE to the students. The district superintendent or a designee is responsible for reporting to the placement committee on the performance of the surrogate parent.

The district is responsible for the training and certification of surrogate parents and needs to maintain a list of persons who may serve as surrogate parents. Through interview, the monitoring team determined the district has not addressed the issue of surrogate parents.

Principle 5- Individualized Education Program

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Surveys
- Student file reviews
- District's Comprehensive plan

Meets Requirements

The Mt. Vernon School District ensures that written notice is provided for all IEP meetings, and includes all required content. In files reviewed by the district, the IEP team is comprised of appropriate team membership and meets all identified responsibilities, and that the IEP contains all required content. The district has policies and procedures in place to ensure an appropriate IEP is developed and in effect for each eligible student

In addition, file reviews completed by the district support transition plans for students are a coordinated set of activities, reflecting student strengths and interests, to prepare them for post school activities.

Validation Results

Meets Requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the steering committee that data for Principle Five: Individualized Education Program meets requirements, except

in the areas of Transition, Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, and Justification. See information under needs assistance.

Needs Assistance

ARSD 24:05:27:01.03 Content of individualized education program (IEP)

Each student's individualized education program shall include:

- (1) A statement of the student's Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, including;
 - a. How the student's disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled students); or
 - b. For preschool student, as appropriate, how the disability affects the student's participation in appropriate activities.

In student file reviews, present levels of performance (PLOP) did not consistently contain the required content (i.e. specific skill area(s) affected by the student's disability, to include strengths and needs, along with how the disability affects the student's involvement in the general curriculum and parent input). File reviews and staff interviews indicated a need to improve functional assessments to acquire the skill-based information to develop present levels of academic achievement and functional performance for students eligible for special education services.

ARSD 24:05:27:01.03(1) Content of individualized education program (IEP) and

ARSD 24:05:27:13.02 Transition Services

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability, designed within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

The monitoring team concluded transition assessments are completed; however, the information collected from a student survey is limited and was not documented in student's present level of academic achievement and

functional performance (PLAAFP). The PLAAFP for the transition areas (employment, education or training and independent living) should be based upon the functional assessment information. The PLAAFP lacked the student's strengths, weakness/needs regarding school to secondary activities; therefore, the IEP lacked a coordinated set of transition activities.

ARSD: 24:05:27:01.03 Content of individualized education program, ARSD 24:05:28:02 Continuum of alternative placements

The IEP must address the justification for placement. This statement must include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children in the general classroom and in extracurricular and non-academic activities.

In student file reviews IEPs did not provide an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child would not participate with non-disabled children in the general classroom. For example, "The team accepted regular classroom for all classes. Student will be doing the accelerated math program in the 8th grade. This will be split up in the regular math room and the resource room. The team accepted a structured study hall of the resource room for student to provide him/her with additional assistance he/she needs to get assignments completed and handed in, and to monitor organization. The structured study hall will allow ____ the opportunity to get additional assistance in writing and reading, math, and other assignments."

Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Surveys
- Student file reviews
- District's Comprehensive plan
- State data table F – Placement Alternative

Meets Requirements

The Mt. Vernon School District ensures through file reviews and the comprehensive plan that all children receive the supports they need to be successful in the least restrictive environment.

Validation Results

Promising Practice

Through staff interviews the monitoring team identified the district's preschool program as a promising practice. The preschool was initially started with a grant, and is now funded by the district. A tuition fee is paid by parents who access the program for their children. The preschool program is available to all children ages three through five. District staff reported the program to be an effective tool in providing appropriate developmental opportunities, as well as a tool for remediating potential areas of concern and early identification of students with special needs.

Meets Requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the steering committee that the district is meeting the requirements for Principle Six: Least Restrictive Environment.